

Keweenaw

Keweenaw National Historical Park

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior



Downtown Calumet



Guide to the historic mining community

Though it may appear today as an out-of-the-way village nestled along the spine of the Keweenaw Peninsula, the Village of Calumet was the heart of the region during copper mining's heyday.

Known as Red Jacket until 1929, the village grew out of a remote, densely forested wilderness into a commercial and cultural center. The success of Red Jacket's businesses, institutions and people was directly tied to the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company. As the fortunes of the copper industry grew and then declined, the village followed — such was life in a mining community. Though copper mining eventually ceased and the prosperity of the era was lost, many buildings and landscapes from this boom time remain, providing an opportunity to explore many stories from the past.

How to use this guide

In the center section of this booklet is a map of Calumet's downtown. Numbers on the map correspond to historic buildings and sites which are featured throughout the text of the booklet. There are also many other historic buildings or businesses that you may enjoy visiting. As you stroll through the downtown, let this guide take you on a journey through our history and heritage.

Copper's Call

Communities with ties to copper have existed on the Keweenaw Peninsula since the first native peoples arrived here thousands of years ago. They discovered the red metal and fashioned it into trade items, ceremonial pieces and hunting tools. Later, the Ojibwe shared their knowledge of copper resources with Europeans. Early commercial attempts to mine copper in today's Ontonagon County were at first unsuccessful, but by 1844, five years before California's gold rush, perseverance paid off. "Copper fever" took hold and lured many to the region.

These early copper prospectors found a land isolated from the rest of the world nearly six months out of the year by heavy snowfall and the tumultuous Lake Superior. While they certainly found adventure, few found anything resembling fortune. Most individuals would not strike it rich here. Instead, investors and businessmen from large Eastern cities funded mining ventures. These large copper mines needed workers, and workers needed places to live. Red Jacket was one of those communities, developing alongside the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company. Copper's call would soon turn the village into the "Queen of the Copper Country."



A forested trail outside the Village of Red Jacket shows some of the conditions that area residents faced during winter in the late 1800s.

This 1881 bird's-eye view shows the location of the village west of the Calumet and Hecla mines. The large open space between the mining operations and the town once served as a pasture. Agassiz Park is located there today.



Life on the Frontier

Surveyor Edwin Hulbert followed a muddy path through a wilderness of marshes and towering trees when he entered the area in the late 1850s. Traces of prehistoric mining pits led him to an exceptionally rich copper lode. Hulbert's discovery resulted in the formation of the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company (C&H), which would dominate the landscape and history of the area.

Named after an orator of the Seneca tribe, the Village of Red Jacket was platted in 1868 on an L-shaped tract of 90 acres. To facilitate mining operations, C&H constructed the streets in the industrial area to follow the direction of the copper bearing rock. The streets in the village, however, followed a typical gridiron pattern that used the four cardinal directions, north to south and east to west. The sharp bend where Red Jacket Road meets Fifth Street, marks the transition between downtown and company land. Red Jacket officially incorporated in 1875.



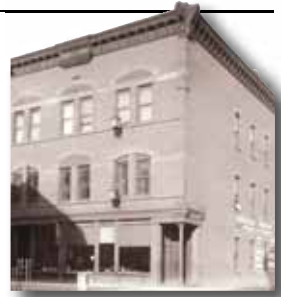
1 Agassiz Park

Today's Agassiz Park was originally a pasture for livestock. Later, it was used as a baseball field. In the early 1920s, Rudolph Agassiz hired well-known Cambridge, Massachusetts, landscape architect Warren H. Manning to design a park dedicated to his father and former C&H President, Alexander Agassiz.

Surrounded by C&H company land on all sides, Red Jacket's layout included a buffer zone between the mines and downtown. The Union Building and St. Anne's Catholic Church act as a gateway into Red Jacket from C&H's industrial operations. Today, these buildings still serve as a reminder of the influence C&H had over worker's daily lives. The company often provided land for churches and other organizations deemed worthy or a benefit to community life.

② Union Building

The Union Building housed fraternal organizations that often provided a social safety net for miners and their families, including sick, death and dismemberment benefits. The terra cotta tiles in the middle of the second and third stories indicate former occupants: the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) and Free and Accepted Masons (F&AM), respectively.



③ God's Little Acre

C&H donated, leased or sold land in this area, also labelled Temple Square on early maps, for the building of numerous churches or community buildings. Managers often supported churches because they assumed attendees would be moral, loyal and more productive. Religious beliefs and traditions provided many residents with a sense of community.

- The Community Church of Calumet originally served a Scottish Presbyterian congregation.
- Christ Episcopal Church was designed by C&H architect Charles W. Whiting in the style of English countryside churches for English and Scotch-Irish residents.
- Carmel Evangelical Swedish Lutheran Church was built with regionally quarried Jacobsville sandstone.
- Red Jacket's first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was located here before moving into a larger facility that once stood beside the Union Building. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks moved into the building around 1910.

④ St. Anne's Catholic Church

St. Anne's, along with the other steeples and bell towers that dot the skyline of Red Jacket, provides insight into the community's ethnic diversity. The architectural firm of Charlton, Gilbert and Demar from Marquette designed the Gothic Revival church for a growing French-Canadian population. Austrians, Italians, Slovenians, Croatians and the Polish also had their own Catholic Churches in Red Jacket. Prendergast and Clarkson Company, of Chicago, built the church out of local Jacobsville sandstone.



Main Street Red Jacket

Scott Street was the official dividing line between the village and Calumet & Hecla company property. Fifth Street became the community's main thoroughfare.

The first commercial buildings appeared on Fifth Street in the late 1860s. At that time, approximately 300 people lived in the village. C&H's success brought in more people and therefore more businesses to Fifth Street. Most of the early town buildings were wood-frame structures, as wood was readily available and they could be constructed quickly and easily. In 1870, a fire blazed through Red Jacket, destroying two-thirds of the downtown buildings. The need to serve mine workers remained and the town was quickly rebuilt.



5 John Green Block

Reportedly the village's oldest wood-frame building, the Green Block represents commercial continuity. Various businesses, such as an undertaker, cigar factory, confectionery and millinery have occupied this commercial block.

Many business owners switched from wood to Jacobsville sandstone, a locally available building material, not only to give a sense of permanence but also to deter future devastating fires. Builders also adopted masonry construction techniques which allowed buildings to become taller and larger. Different architectural styles and more decorative features were often included. Despite the air of endurance, change would always be a part of Red Jacket's makeup.



6 Calumet Block

Not everyone came to work in the mines. The Calumet Block once served as the company offices for locally renowned Norwegian contractor Edward Ulseth. Over a two-year period from 1898-99, Ulseth's construction company — the largest in the area at the time — built about 400 area buildings.

7 Holman Block

Holman and Williams were grocers. In 1900, they rented the other half of their store to Jewish businessman Izzy Blumenthal, who sold dry goods and clothes. Later, the Holman Block shared space with a gallery for the flourishing medium of photography.

Commercial ventures on Fifth Street struggled to keep up with the community's growing population and needs. Business owners remodeled and sometimes demolished smaller buildings to construct larger ones in their place. Newer buildings often took the form of a commercial block, and were frequently named after the investors who financed the project. Store, shop or office space was rented out on the first floor, and hall, office or apartment space filled the upper floors.



Holman & Williams Grocery in 1900.

8 Baer Brothers Building

The Baer Brothers provided a valuable commodity to the people of Red Jacket: meat. This one and a half story building is typical of an early store where the owners lived above their business.



9 Ruppe Block

This large building was one of Red Jacket's first department stores. In 1900, P. Ruppe and Son added a third floor and new front to the original sandstone building to both satisfy increasing demand and also compete with newer and larger stores such as Vertin's on Oak Street.

10 Paine Webber and Company

This site was first home to the National Fruit Store, then to Paine Webber and Company of Boston, Massachusetts. This company's presence shows the long-standing ties of eastern investors to area copper.



Boomtown Red Jacket



The large brick and sandstone buildings at the intersection of Oak and Sixth—and the width of the streets and sidewalks where people once ran to catch streetcars—are not typical features in a village with a population of 880 people. They serve as reminders of Red Jacket’s height of prosperity.

11 Michigan Hotel

The Michigan Hotel was designed by Charles W. Maass as a showplace for the Bosch Brewing Company. The hotel often served an elite clientele and provided carriage service that brought its patrons from the Mineral Range Railroad Depot to the hotel. The interior retains many historic features.

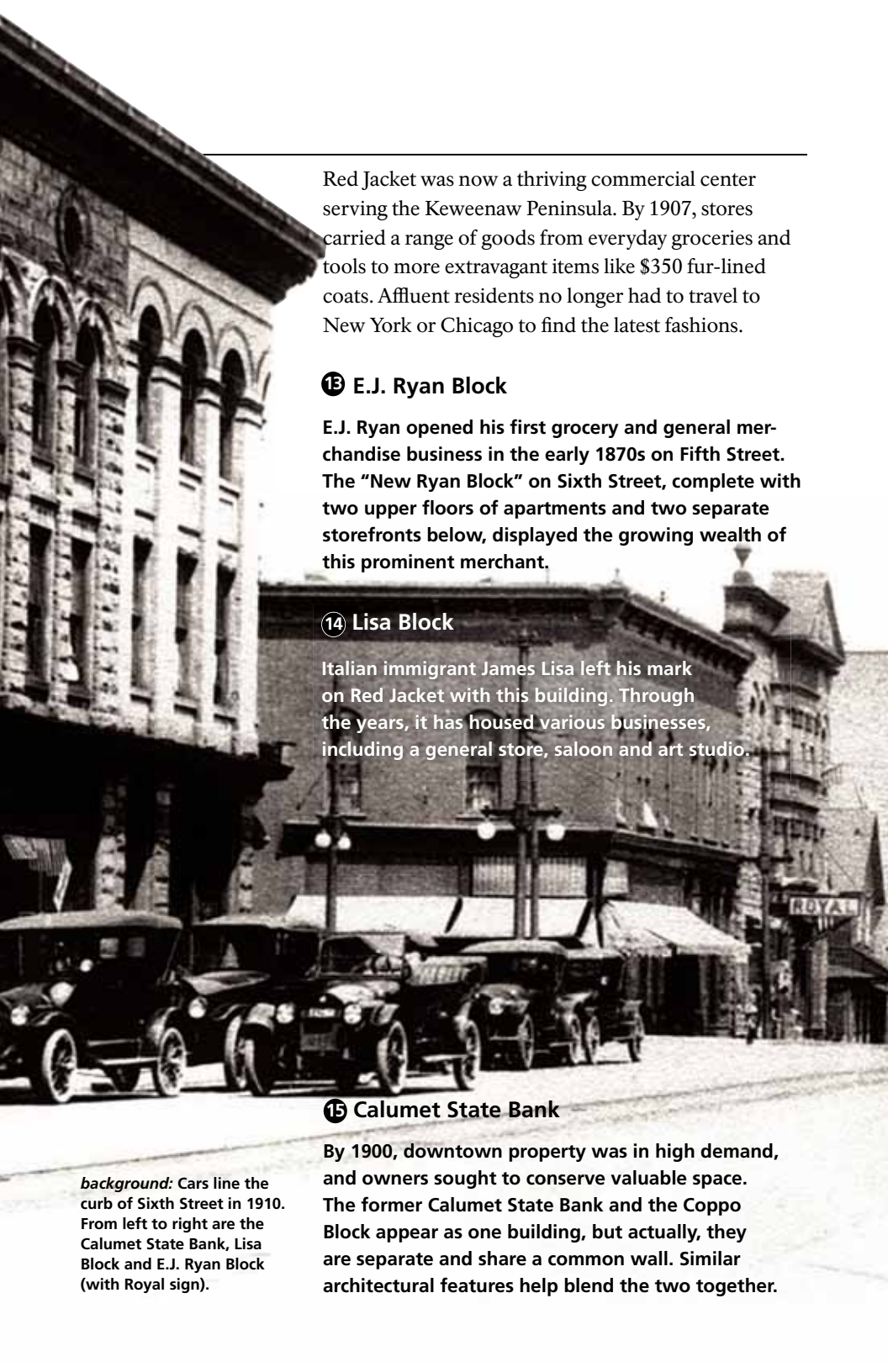
Between 1890 and 1915, the community entered its “boomtown” period. The prosperity of C&H brought more people and more businesses to Red Jacket. In 1880, Red Jacket had 2,140 residents. That number rose to 3,070 by 1890. By 1900, nearly 4,670 residents were crowded together in the village’s 90 acres. Based on population density per square mile, Red Jacket’s 1900 figure was equivalent to that experienced on the island of Manhattan today. Another 30,000 people lived within walking distance of the downtown in the surrounding communities and townships.

Space was at a premium. Buildings, therefore, had to expand upward. Professionally trained architects designed and remodeled these buildings once again, indicating the community’s affluence.



12 Vertin's Department Store

Vertin's remains the largest commercial building in downtown Red Jacket. The popular store served everyone from miners to managers, and by 1899 required more space to meet demand. The added brick upper floors signify a shift away from Jacobsville sandstone as the preferred building material.



Red Jacket was now a thriving commercial center serving the Keweenaw Peninsula. By 1907, stores carried a range of goods from everyday groceries and tools to more extravagant items like \$350 fur-lined coats. Affluent residents no longer had to travel to New York or Chicago to find the latest fashions.

13 E.J. Ryan Block

E.J. Ryan opened his first grocery and general merchandise business in the early 1870s on Fifth Street. The “New Ryan Block” on Sixth Street, complete with two upper floors of apartments and two separate storefronts below, displayed the growing wealth of this prominent merchant.

14 Lisa Block

Italian immigrant James Lisa left his mark on Red Jacket with this building. Through the years, it has housed various businesses, including a general store, saloon and art studio.

15 Calumet State Bank

By 1900, downtown property was in high demand, and owners sought to conserve valuable space. The former Calumet State Bank and the Coppo Block appear as one building, but actually, they are separate and share a common wall. Similar architectural features help blend the two together.

background: Cars line the curb of Sixth Street in 1910. From left to right are the Calumet State Bank, Lisa Block and E.J. Ryan Block (with Royal sign).

Calumet's Historic Downtown



- 1 Agassiz Park** (1923)
- 2 Union Building** (1888)
98 Fifth Street
- 3 God's Little Acre or Temple Square**
- 4 St. Anne's Church** (1900)
Fifth & Scott Streets
- 5 John Green Block** (ca. 1869)
101 Fifth Street
- 6 Calumet Block** (ca. 1900)
104 Fifth Street
- 7 Holman Block** (1896)
116 - 120 Fifth Street
- 8 Baer Brothers Building** (ca. 1880)
201 Fifth Street
- 9 Ruppe Block** (1870)
211 Fifth Street
- 10 Paine, Webber & Company** (ca. 1905)
311 Fifth Street
- 11 Michigan Hotel** (1880)
515 Oak Street
- 12 Vertin Brothers Department Store** (1891)
216 - 220 Sixth Street
- 13 Edward J. Ryan Block** (1898)
305 - 307 Sixth Street
- 14 Lisa Block** (1890)
301 Sixth Street
- 15 Calumet State Bank** (1906)
219 Sixth Street
- 16 Coppo Block** (1902)
215 - 217 Sixth Street
- 17 Mineral Range Railroad Depot** (1907-08)
Ninth & Oak Streets
- 18 St. Paul's Church** (1903)
Eighth & Oak Streets
- 19 St. John the Baptist Croatian Church** (1903)
324 Seventh Street
- 20 Norwegian Lutheran Church** (1898)
Corner of Seventh & Elm Streets
- 21 Italian Hall Memorial Park** (1989)
401 Seventh Street
- 22 Red Jacket Fire Station** (1898)
327 Sixth Street
- 23 Red Jacket Town Hall and Opera House**
(1886 & 1900)
340 Sixth Street
- 24 Marco Curto's (Shute's) Saloon** (1895)
322 Sixth Street
- 25 U.S. Post Office, Calumet Branch** (1939)
229 Sixth Street
- 26 Murphy Block** (ca. 1888)
301 Fifth Street



St. Anne's Church and the Union Building stand sentinel at the entrance to Fifth Street.

Use caution when crossing streets • Watch for uneven or slippery surfaces • Please remain on sidewalks or paths • Do not enter vacant buildings. • Most buildings are privately owned. Please respect private property

Anatomy of a Historic Storefront

Red Jacket's traditional storefronts help convey an early 1900s appearance and feeling. Early wood frame commercial structures usually received only simple architectural treatments such as window moldings or a bracketed wood cornice. Later, larger masonry buildings incorporated more ornate designs and varied materials. Many elements, like pressed metal cornices, terra cotta trim, molded brick, cast iron piers and columns could even be ordered from catalogs.

Storefronts often have similar arrangements of standard features including: a display window, bulkhead, recessed entry, transom windows and a storefront cornice. Many features were decorative, but others served a practical purpose. Before electricity, transom windows brought in additional sunlight. Recessed entries provided additional window display space and protection from the weather. Buildings that retain these traditional features provide an important connection to Calumet's early architectural history.



Historic Storefront Features

Pediment

Cornice

Window hoods

Regularly spaced windows

Window sill

Storefront cornice

Signboard

Transom Window

Pilaster

Display window

Recessed entry

Bulkhead

Second floor access

Calumet's Ethnic Mix

Drawn by America's opportunities, immigrants to the Copper Country, left homes in many countries. French Canadians and Europeans from the British Isles, Germany and Ireland first settled the area. Booming mines needed more workers, and some companies even sent agents overseas to recruit men for the hard labor.



16 Coppo Block

From the late 1800s through the early 1900s ethnic groups often worked together to support their members in a new and unfamiliar country. Established immigrants might run boarding houses in their own homes. Others built hotels or apartment buildings with first floor storefronts like the Coppo Block. Ethnic organizations would help new arrivals find jobs, fit into the community and secure their own homes.



17 Mineral Range Passenger Depot

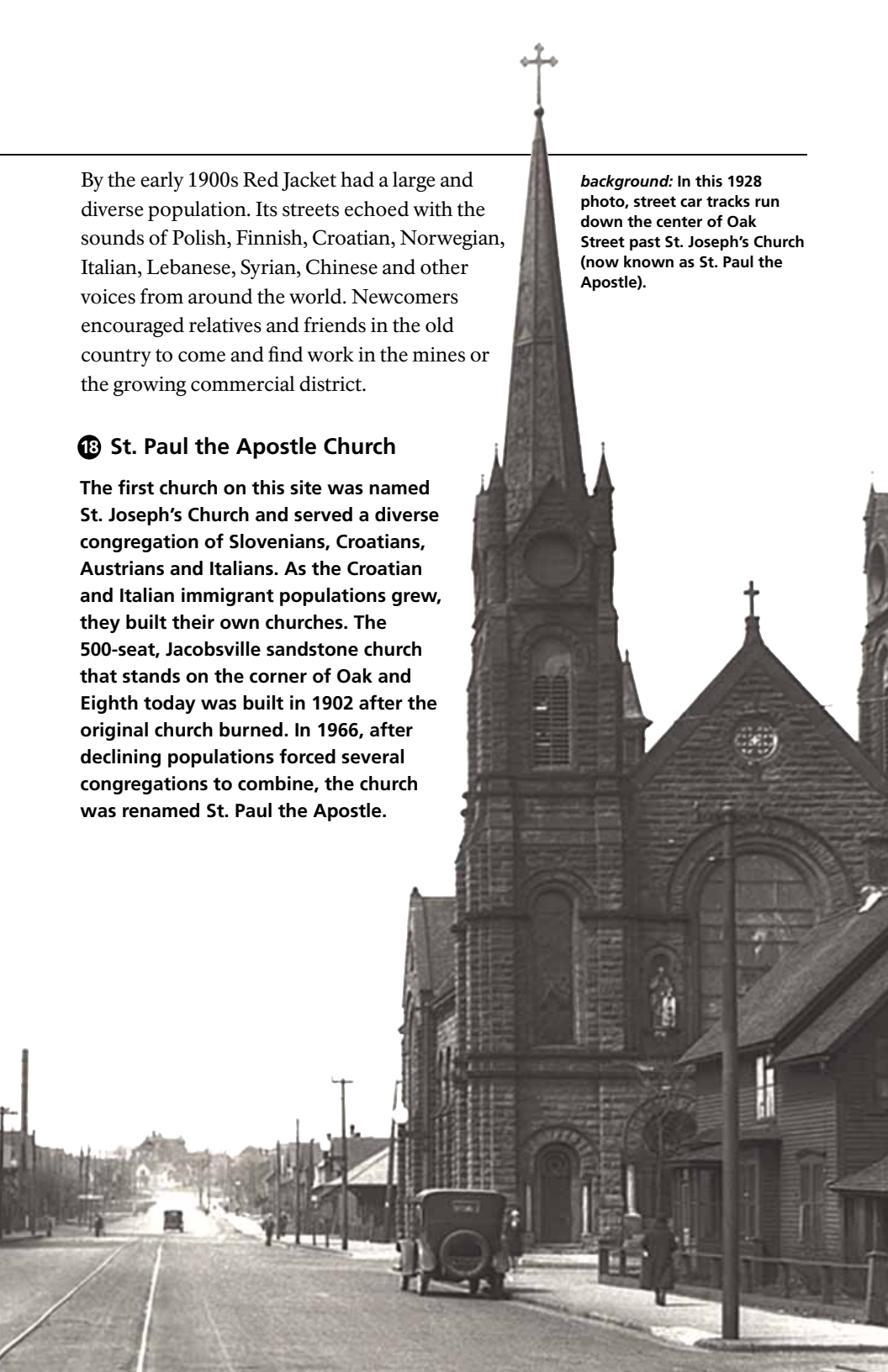
Though vacant and quiet now, this railroad station once connected Red Jacket to faraway cities like Chicago and Milwaukee. Tears of joy and the chatter of various languages filled the air at this bustling entry point for the thousands of immigrants to the Copper Country. When the trains unloaded, family members might be reunited after months or sometimes years of separation.

By the early 1900s Red Jacket had a large and diverse population. Its streets echoed with the sounds of Polish, Finnish, Croatian, Norwegian, Italian, Lebanese, Syrian, Chinese and other voices from around the world. Newcomers encouraged relatives and friends in the old country to come and find work in the mines or the growing commercial district.

background: In this 1928 photo, street car tracks run down the center of Oak Street past St. Joseph's Church (now known as St. Paul the Apostle).

18 St. Paul the Apostle Church

The first church on this site was named St. Joseph's Church and served a diverse congregation of Slovenians, Croatians, Austrians and Italians. As the Croatian and Italian immigrant populations grew, they built their own churches. The 500-seat, Jacobsville sandstone church that stands on the corner of Oak and Eighth today was built in 1902 after the original church burned. In 1966, after declining populations forced several congregations to combine, the church was renamed St. Paul the Apostle.





Once the place of worship for Red Jacket's Croatian Roman Catholic community, St. John the Baptist Church was deconsecrated in 1966 after the area's Croatian population declined.

19 St. John the Baptist Church

The white cross over a red and white shield just below the bell tower reveals this church's Croatian connection. Croats began attending mass in a wood-frame structure on this site in 1901. After fire destroyed the original church, this brick structure was built and dedicated in 1940.

Churches played important functions in local society. They provided places where immigrants could attend to their spiritual needs comfortably by joining with others who spoke their "home" language. Churches helped groups maintain their ethnic identity through music, food and other cultural traditions. They also often provided a way to stay in contact with relatives in their homeland.

While maintaining a distinct ethnic identity was a strength for many, it also made people vulnerable to labels and discrimination. When newspapers reported accidents they often referred to victims not by name, but by nationality: a horse racing down the street knocked down "an Italian." C&H stereotyped immigrants as well. Believing that Finns were a source of trouble and labor unrest in the mines, James MacNaughton, C&H's General Manager, told the commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island that "we do not want Finlanders."

An Italian musician entertains family members.
Photo courtesy of Sue Dana.



Early 1900s reform movements were gaining popularity with some Red Jacket residents. Concerns over child labor, workers' rights, rising unemployment and cramped living conditions led to calls for change. While mining companies may have held Finns responsible for causing labor problems, unsafe conditions, long work days and low pay were shared complaints regardless of ethnicity. Changes at C&H would soon ignite the tension and place Red Jacket at center stage in the national labor movement for a brief period.

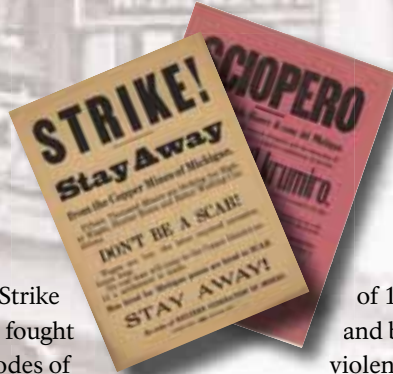
Turbulent Times



above: a worker reads news about the strike in front of the Western Federation of Miners Union Headquarters in Calumet.

background: Mine workers protest the introduction of the one-man drill.

inset: English and Italian language strike posters.



Labor unrest was fueled by the 1913 introduction of a one-man drill, which would drastically reduce the workforce. The Western Federation of Miners labor union (WFM) faced off against the mighty copper companies and called for a strike on July 23, 1913.

The Strike of 1913 was hard fought and bitter, with episodes of violence and tragedy. James MacNaughton, C&H's General Manager, hired armed guards to protect him as he walked the streets of Red Jacket. Mother Jones, the 84-year-old labor activist — deemed “the most dangerous woman in America” by President Teddy Roosevelt — led strikers' parades down Fifth Street. Attorney Clarence Darrow gave union speeches at the Red Jacket Opera House. Local business owners and mine managers formed the Citizen's Alliance to stage counter-protests. For months, C&H's machinery lay idle, and downtown sidewalks rang with the sound of angry strikers interrupting the hustle and bustle of commerce. The Michigan National Guard arrived to stabilize the situation, but uncertainty — and tension — simmered.

20 Norwegian Lutheran Church

Soon after arriving in Red Jacket, a group of Norwegian immigrants organized a Lutheran church and constructed their first building in 1872. The present structure was built in 1898 on this site secured from C&H. Local contractor and civic leader Edward Ulseth was active in the congregation, and served on the building committee.



Tragedy at Italian Hall

As winter arrived, the strike had entered its sixth month. To provide relief, the WFM Women's Auxiliary organized a Christmas Eve party on the Italian Hall's second floor. It was a multi-ethnic affair; a red WFM union card was the only requirement for admission. What happened that night would go far beyond breaking the festive mood — it broke a community's heart.

Witness reports vary, but most say that someone yelled "FIRE!" The crowd raced for the steep stairway, but could not exit quickly enough. Pushed and shoved by panicked people at the top, those at the bottom suffocated.

Firefighters arrived on the scene, but there was no fire. Instead, they began the somber task of removing the bodies. A makeshift morgue for the victims was set up in the ballroom above the Red Jacket Town Hall. Outside, grief-stricken friends and family wept in the falling snow. All told, 74 people, including 60 children and 14 adults, died.



21 Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana (Italian Hall)

This sandstone arch and quiet park is all that remains of Italian Hall (seen in the background photo). The building fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1984.

A Town in Transition

22 Red Jacket Fire Station

Over the years, fires have destroyed many buildings in Red Jacket. Scorched sandstone on foundations may indicate where fire has left its mark. This fire station was built in 1900 to provide greater protection for the growing community.



23 Red Jacket Opera House and Town Hall

By 1898, the Village of Red Jacket had a sizeable surplus in its treasury. Local leaders decided to expand the town hall with the addition of a 1,200 seat opera house. The theater opened on March 20, 1900, with a touring Broadway production of Reginald DeKoven's *The Highwaymen*. Over the years, numerous well-known performers made their way to Red Jacket, including John Phillip Sousa, Sarah Bernhardt, Jason Robards, Sr. and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.



The Italian Hall tragedy left the community in mourning, and diminished the fervor both for and against the strike. By April 1914, workers returned to their jobs. C&H felt victorious for not caving into union demands, but new challenges lay right around the corner.

Mines in the western U.S. were now the country's major copper producers. The growing automobile industry and Henry Ford's promise of a \$5.00 per day wage — when laborers here were earning half that amount — attracted many mine workers south to Detroit. As always, the town's successes and struggles largely depended on the fortunes of C&H.

The growing demand for copper during World War I temporarily boosted Red Jacket's economy, but after the conflict ended markets were flooded and prices plummeted. By the early 1920s, the boomtown was busting. As difficult as these trials were, greater hardships lay ahead.

The Best and Worst of Times



The stock market collapse in 1929 and the Great Depression that followed brought C&H's mines and million-dollar machinery to a standstill. Thousands in Red Jacket—now officially known as Calumet—were jobless. Many people left the area for better luck elsewhere. Others, however, returned from Detroit's closed factories to supportive homes and families. Federal relief efforts, such as the Works Project Administration, attempted to put people back to work.

Though times were tough, Pete Manzini, who grew up in Calumet during the Great Depression, remembers that he did not need money to have fun. Pete and his friends took advantage of Calumet's long winters by sledding down area hills and playing pick-up hockey games. During the summer, time was spent weeding gardens and harvesting home-grown produce such as potatoes and tomatoes. Local markets assisted people by extending credit. As they had in other trying times, people found ways to survive.

24 Curto/Shute's Saloon

In 1900, Marco Curto's Saloon (on the right in photo) was one of 48 bars in Red Jacket. Eight years later, the number had grown to 78. Nationwide concern about alcohol use prompted the U.S. Congress and states to ratify the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, ushering in the Prohibition Era. Michael Shute made moonshine and home brew in the basement until 1932. In 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the National Prohibition Law.

The building's main floor has always been a working saloon. In addition to being a residence, members of Local 413 of the Cigar Maker's Union held their meetings on the second floor around 1900. Shute's also retains many original interior features, including a stained-glass canopy over the bar.

As residents weathered the 1930s, war once again changed Calumet's fortunes. Industry mobilized to support the country's entry into World War II, helping to end the Great Depression. As in 1914, fighting the war required copper. The federal government subsidized C&H to ensure production. When the war finally ended, so did the temporary boom. By 1950, the village population had dropped to 1,255 people. Neither the mine nor Calumet would ever experience a copper rush again.

Despite the copper industry's ups and downs, Calumet remained a commercial center for the region. The final closure of C&H in 1968, economic recession, and the growth of the City of Houghton, however, led many residents and businesses to seek their fortunes elsewhere. By the late 1970s, the once-bustling downtown sat deteriorating and silent.

25 Calumet Post Office

The Calumet Post Office was constructed as part of the Works Project Administration's federal building program during the Great Depression. Joseph A. Lasker's 1941 mural *Copper Mining in Calumet* hangs in the public lobby.



Calumet's Rebirth

The demolition of several historic buildings like the Italian Hall awoke not only an interest in the area's history, but also the realization that this local copper mining story was nationally significant.

Locally led historic preservation efforts gained momentum in the 1980s, and continue today. Downtown Calumet was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1989. When Keweenaw National Historical Park was established in 1992, the village was included in one of the park units. In 2003, Calumet's downtown was selected as a Historic Main Street District. The historic buildings and streetscapes preserve stories of the people who endured the struggles and celebrated the successes of life in a copper mining community.

Throughout its history, the Village of Calumet has witnessed both prosperity and adversity. While the town may never again reverberate with the sounds of copper mines, its mining heritage will always be a part of the community.

26 Murphy Block

Like Calumet, this 1888 building has seen a community's changing economy. Red Jacket's first post office was located here until it moved to the Union Building. A grocery next set up shop. By 1900, the building was known as the Murphy Block and housed a wine, liquor and cigar store. For a time, the Salvation Army even operated here. The current owners recently restored the building's historic appearance, and while its future is uncertain, its history endures.



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